

# The Unlikely, Almost King

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Preacher: Oscar Chow

[ 0 : 00 ] Thank you, Gabriel and Joyce, for reading that extra-long passage. And good morning, everybody. For those that don't know me, my name is Oscar. I'm one of the elders here at Watermark Community Church.

Again, it's great to be here, worshiping God with you guys this morning, and an extra-special welcome to some of our guests that are here. Great to have you with us today. Worshiping in the house of God. Would you pray with me as we consider God's Word? Father God, thank you for your Word, which is living, active, sharper than a double-edged sword, penetrating deep into our hearts.

Father, as we receive your Word today, I pray, God, that it would be your Word that comes through, and not my words, Lord. I pray your Holy Spirit would help me to convey your message today, Father, from your Word.

I pray for all of our hearts here, God. We would be open to receive your Word. We would see our own sin in our lives, our own depravity.

[ 1 : 20 ] But at the same time, we'll see the grace and love of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. Amen. Some of you know this about me, but one of my biggest weaknesses, one of my biggest weaknesses is my truly horrible sense of direction.

I lived in Causeway Bay for four years, but honestly, if you drop me right now in Times Square, I wouldn't know which direction Wan Chai is. I think my wife can attest to that.

After we got married, I moved into Celeste's apartment in Pak Fulam, just close by here to Ebenezer. And she kept telling me how good the minibus system was from Pak Fulam to Central. So one day, I hopped on the number 10 bus, hoping to go to my office in Central. Ten minutes later, I was in Cyberport. I called Celeste, angrily accusing her of giving me the wrong directions, to which she said calmly, Honey, you got on the wrong bus in the wrong direction.

And then I made the exact same mistake about a month later. And I don't mind sharing this weakness, this struggle I have, because although it's a bit embarrassing, it's probably more funny than tragic.

[ 2 : 44 ] But I can imagine there are people here at Watermark, myself included, who have weaknesses, who have struggles, that you would probably rather not talk about.

But I think if we're truly honest, at some level, all of us hate feeling weak. We struggle with having uncertain or stressful jobs, difficult family members, disobedient children, because, well, these struggles make life feel out of control, and that makes us feel weak.

And we don't like that. I think if we're honest, we wish these struggles would go away, and then life would be easier. We would rather be self-sufficient and self-reliant than having to depend on God. This morning, we're continuing our sermon series called Christ in the Old Testament, and today we're looking at the story of Gideon, and how God uses this weak man, this unlikely hero, to make his glory known.

But Gideon had to first come face-to-face with an impossible battle before the power of God was shown. Gideon had to be weak before God's power was made known.

[ 4 : 01 ] Now, over the past few weeks, we've called this sermon series Christ in the Old Testament, because the whole Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is one story about the glory of God.

It's one story which points us to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Two weeks ago, Kevin shared from Genesis, where Abraham intercedes with God on behalf of Sodom.

And in that passage, Abraham searched for one righteous man, but no one was righteous. Only Jesus Christ, our great high priest, is righteous.

And last week, Chris also preached from Genesis in the passage where Jacob wrestles with God. And there, we learn that God often breaks us to bless us.

And we were reminded that it was Christ that was broken on the cross to bless us and to save us. Today, we're looking at the story of Gideon in the book of Judges.

[ 4 : 57 ] Now, a very quick summary of Judges for everybody here. Judges records one of the darkest times in Israel's history, between 1375 and 1050 B.C.

During this time, Israel would continually go through a vicious cycle. It would follow false gods of the people around them, disobey God, and as a result, would face immense persecution from the very people whose idols they followed.

Israel would then cry out to God and God would hear her cry and raise up a judge who would deliver her. And there's one recurring phrase in Judges which sums up their state of morality, which is, in those days, Israel had no king and everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

Nowhere in the Bible is the depravity of man described at such length and in such explicit detail than in Judges. Idolatry, fornication, self-promotion, and murder are just some of the wickedness mentioned in this book.

But the stark counterpoint to Israel's idolatry in Judges is God's mercy, his patience, his faithfulness, his grace.

[ 6 : 19 ] Israel would sin against God, but God would again and again forgive and deliver Israel from her enemies. In essence, this is the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In spite of our sin and our rebellion, God gives us his grace. But today, as you look at the story of Gideon, what we'll see is, we'll see the oppression brought about by Israel's idolatry.

We'll see how God calls his weak man Gideon to be a mighty warrior and deliverer through God's own strength. And finally, we'll see that Gideon, in fact, points us to the true deliverer and king, Jesus Christ.

There's a fair bit of content in this story, but what I'm going to do is I'm going to walk through the story of Gideon while bringing out four main takeaways. There they are.

Ready? All right. Ed's ready. It's good. Number one. Judges chapter 6, verse 1. The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord gave them into the hand of Midian seven years.

[ 7 : 37 ] Now, what does doing evil in the sight of the Lord mean? What was Israel's sin? Now, we know during Gideon's time that Israel had no king, and everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

So every man had his own version of what morality was. And when Israel entered Canaan, God called them to take over the land, but instead, Canaan came into their hearts.

Israel was drawn in and tempted by the worldly ways of the Canaanite people. Jumping ahead to verse 25. Here, God instructs Gideon to tear down two pagan idols, the altar to Baal and the Asherah pole.

A Baal was believed to be the god of the harvest, and Asherah was believed to be the goddess of fertility and love. And the Canaanite people would give offerings to these two gods hoping to receive something in return.

They even sacrificed their own children to Baal and Asherah. And Israel was drawn to this because, well, they said to themselves, we'll worship Yahweh, the god of our forefathers, but we'll also worship Baal because, well, we're farmers and we need to have a good harvest this year.

[ 8 : 55 ] And while we're at it, we'll also worship Asherah because, well, we need to raise, we need to have more children to continue our family line. They hedged their religious bets, so to speak.

Now, you may think, well, I don't bow down to a wooden idol. None of this applies to me. But though our modern-day idols may not be idols of wood, don't we struggle with idols of the heart?

For idolatry is when in our hearts we place anything above God. And I think one of the biggest idols as parents is the idol of our children's success.

I think because, maybe because of how competitive the world is becoming, we think as parents we need to exert an enormous amount of energy to maximize our children's potential success when they become adults.

Sometimes when I speak to parents, my sense is they think if their children could just have two things, fluency in Mandarin and a Harvard degree, they'll be set up for life.

[ 10 : 06 ] some can relate to that, I think. Idolatry is about wanting to do things in our own strength, about wanting to be in control instead of letting God be in control.

In Gideon's day, Israel would feed Baal and Asherah offerings to get what they wanted. And for us, we pursue our heart idols to try to control our destiny.

So what happened to Israel as a result of her idolatry? Look at verses two to five. The Midianites did not just rule Israel politically like in previous oppressors and judges.

It was much worse. In verse five, we read that the Midianites were like locusts in number. Both they and their camels could not be counted. They laid waste the land as they came in.

The Midianites threatened Israel's very existence by destroying their livestock and their crops. And so, the consequence of idolatry and sin is complete oppression and fear.

[ 11 : 23 ] Israel had to hide from the Midianites in dens in the mountains. They were constantly on the move, afraid, unsettled. And ironically, Israel was being persecuted by the very people whose idols they took for their own.

Isn't that how idolatry works? Tim Keller in his book *Counterfeit Gods* describes a woman who had an unhealthy desire to give her kids the perfect life.

But this desire drove her to be overprotective, fearful, and anxious, and her need to control every detail of her children's lives hurt her and those around her. It gave her no joy, and it resulted in one child having developmental issues, and the other child anger issues.

Her idol was the thing that oppressed her. Now, your children may not have anger or developmental issues, but let me ask you, is your desire to see your children succeed above your desire to know the nature of God, to experience his joy, to delight in him for who he is?

The only way to rid ourselves of idol worship, of this desire which will ultimately oppress us, is to recognize the idolatry and the sin submitted to Christ and allow him to destroy it.

[ 12 : 58 ] Second takeaway, the calling of a weak, mighty warrior. Verse 11, now the angel of the Lord came and sat under the terebinth, which is a tree, at Ophrah, Gideon's hometown, which belonged to Joash the Abiazrite, Gideon's father, while Gideon was beating out wheat in a wine press to hide it from the Midianites.

And the angel of the Lord appeared to him and said to him, the Lord is with you, O mighty man of valor. But God calls Gideon, this unlikely hero, to be Israel's deliverer.

Now when I think of a hero, I think of gladiators, Russell Crowe, a courageous army general, a born leader, thick beard.

At first glance, Gideon appears to be the exact opposite. He wasn't even a soldier. He was a farmer. The first mention of him is him hiding away from the Midianites, threshing wheat in a wine press.

And in verse 14, when the angel of the Lord says to Gideon, save Israel from the hand of Midian, do not I send you, what does Gideon say?

[ 14 : 20 ] He says, how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house.

Not exactly a courageous response. But perhaps, worst of all, Gideon was ignorant of the state of Israel's heart and his own heart.

He says to the angel of the Lord, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us? Why are we being persecuted if God is with us? Not when a bank robber robs a bank, gets caught red-handed, perpetrating the crime.

When the police come to arrest him, he doesn't say, why are you arresting me? He's caught red-handed. But look at Gideon. There are two idols in his backyard. He doesn't even realize his own idolatry and sin.

But yet, in spite of Gideon's fear, his weakness, and ignorance, God in his mercy and in his grace chooses this unlikely man to deliver Israel from her oppression.

[ 15 : 30 ] But God doesn't just give Gideon verbal instructions and then expects him to follow blindly. In verse 17, Gideon asks God for a sign to know if he is a true God, Yahweh, that he's talking to.

But Gideon prepares the sacrifice of meat, bread, and broth, brings them under the terebinth, under the tree, places them on a rock, and the angel of the Lord touches the offering with the tip of his staff.

fire burns up from the rock, consuming the offering, and the angel of the Lord disappears, vanishes, showing his power and true self as who?

The almighty God of the universe. God was right there. God had revealed a very, a part of his very nature to Gideon.

And this marker, this catalyst, would serve as a very important turning point in Gideon's life. Before this point, he was a fearful farmer, threshing wheat in a wine press, hiding away.

[16:39] After seeing a glimpse of the glory of God through the fire, Gideon worships God, and then he does two things he never thought he would do. First, he cuts down the altar of Baal and the Asherah pole, both of which were in his father's house.

So he came directly against his father and against the men of the town who wanted to kill him for doing so. Second, he sacrifices his father's prize bull.

And remember, the Midianites were oppressing Israel by killing off their livestock. So you can imagine, a prize bull would have been a scarce resource at that time.

But in this way, God was telling Gideon, I know you don't have many bulls left. Bulls are becoming very scarce, but sacrifice this one for me.

You can trust me. When you are insufficient, I am more than sufficient. So what's the best way to build courage as a Christian?

[17:47] desire God. Desire to see his face. Desire to know him better and better and better and better. Pray for this to happen in your life.

Even God calls us. He doesn't just expect us to follow blindly. He reveals his glory to us through the Holy Spirit, through his word, through the many men and women that he puts in our lives.

God. But Gideon still struggled with fully trusting God, didn't he? Verse 36, after God had revealed himself to Gideon, Gideon asks for yet another sign.

He says to God, if you indeed will help me save Israel, well, I need further proof that you're sovereign. He lays his wool fleece on the threshing floor.

He says to God, well, if there's dew on the fleece in the morning but the ground around the fleece is dry, then, well, I know you're with me. And it was so.

[18:58] But apparently that wasn't enough for Gideon. He tests God yet again. This time he says to God, this time he asks for the fleece to be dry and the ground to be wet around the fleece.

And God indulges Gideon yet again. What is going on here? Although Gideon saw God in the fire, although God had spoken directly to Gideon, Gideon was just a frail human being like you and I.

And he still wrestled with fear and with doubt. And that is okay. Because although God is sovereign, all-powerful, he's also incredibly patient and long-suffering.

Now get this. It's not in spite of Gideon's weakness that God uses him. It's not in spite of Gideon's weakness. It's actually because of Gideon's weakness that God uses him.

It was because of Gideon's weakness that God's power and glory will be made known to Israel and to the world in the battle against the Midianites. See, in the upside-down counterintuitive nature of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, it is not those who are self-reliant, self-righteous, like the Pharisees who are the sons and daughters of Almighty God.

[20:30] No. It is the broken man and woman, the childlike, the humble, who says, God, I come to you in my weakness with nothing, but in you I have everything.

Third takeaway. How are we doing so far? Are we good? Ed's still good. Okay, great. Third takeaway, God's victory in our weakness.

And so Gideon, with increase but still questionable faith, rallies his troops from other tribes of Israel and readies his men to attack the Midianites. You can imagine Gideon getting his 32,000 men ready, sharpening their swords.

Maybe he gave them a Mel Gibson Braveheart-like pep talk. But then the Lord says to Gideon in chapter 7 verse 2, the people, the people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand.

Lest Israel boast over me saying, my own hand has saved me. But God says, if any soldier is fearful, let him go home.

[21:46] 22,000 soldiers left then and there. Gideon lost close to 70% of his men right there. Let's put ourselves in Gideon's shoes for a second.

Gideon, the fearful farmer who we found hiding away, threshing wheat in a wine press, he probably thought that 32,000 men versus 135,000 Midianites was too difficult at the start.

But now with only 10,000 men left, God says there are still too many. Imagine what Gideon must have thought. With only 10,000 men left, I'm massively outnumbered.

I need more men, not fewer men. But God takes Gideon and his men down to the water for a drink. He sifts Gideon's men yet again and in the process and afterwards only 300 men remained. Gideon lost 99% of his men before the battle even began. He was outnumbered 450 to one. His men only had trumpets and candles.

[ 22 : 56 ] One trumpet to 450 swords. Imagine that. An impossible victory. Gideon must have thought, God, I am completely relying on you to win this battle.

If you don't come through here, this won't just be an embarrassing defeat. My men and I, we're going to die. But why does God do this to Gideon?

But why does God do this to us? Why does God put seemingly impossible battles in our lives? I would argue two reasons.

First, this is the normal Christian life. In the book of Habakkuk, God tells the prophet Habakkuk, the righteous shall live by faith.

The righteous shall live by faith. faith. I think most Christians know that it is by faith and not by works that we initially come to receive Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

[ 24 : 02 ] But we also need to exercise faith along our entire journey as Christ followers. We don't just come to believe in Christ and then our entire lives consist of strawberries and cream where we're just relying on ourselves.

We have to learn to lean on God in every single aspect of our lives. That is why Paul says to pray unceasingly because if we really do so, it means that we are relying on God for everything.

And this leads me to point number two. Point number two is because God is merciful. Now this may sound strange, right? How does allowing us to struggle show God's mercy?

But if we truly understand our own heart condition, we realize we really don't like having lean on God, do we?

But the longer we go on believing in our own self-sufficiency, the more removed we are from trusting God. Our idols become giants in all that we care about.

[ 25 : 09 ] God becomes very small and we lose our understanding of God. We lose sight of the very nature of God as sovereign, majestic, powerful.

And so God in his mercy sometimes puts these impossible, difficult battles in front of us. So we wake up and realize that we're reminded of who he is and that he is in control.

I've always loved being in control. But for me personally, I feel like my life over these past six months has been more out of control than it's ever been. I left my previous job a few months ago and I'm starting a new job.

Actually, I'm not even sure when the new job is going to start. That's how uncertain it is. My wife Celeste and I are having twins, which we're very excited about. But twins, that's uncertain, right? Right? And finally, just standing up here in front of you all trying to convey God's word. If you had asked me a couple years ago if I could do this, I would have said, no way, that's impossible.

[ 26 : 22 ] I could barely speak until I was five years old. But you know, in the midst of all that's been going on in my life, I've seen my own weakness, how desperate I need God.

And you know, through this all, I've come to see God in a new way as being more wonderful, more beautiful, more faithful than before. And you know, strangely, it's been freeing for me.

And I believe God wants all of us to come to a place where we're broken and desperate, on our knees, admitting our weakness to him, and where our maximum weakness comes face to face with his abundant faithfulness.

I know it's totally counterintuitive because we all hate feeling weak, but if we really want to know God, taste the sweetness of who he is, to feel the joy that is in Christ, I think we regularly need to recognize situations where we say to God, like Gideon did, God, I give this to you.

You don't come through here. I'm finished. I'm done. I cannot go on. Because that is where God's power is revealed.

[ 27 : 48 ] That is where we see his glory, his awesomeness at work. And isn't this the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ? When we come to God, we come to him in all our weakness, all our brokenness, and all our sin.

we come to him with our hands open, but nothing to give him but our faith, our righteousness, worthless, our accolades, our CV, useless.

And yet, in our weakness, if our faith is in Christ, we are fully accepted by God. God. And so, for Gideon, in spite of being outnumbered 135,000 to 300, 450 to 1, God delivered the Midianites into

his hand that day.

Gideon's army didn't even raise a sword. All they had were trumpets and candles. When they blew the 300 trumpets, the passage says that the Lord set every man's sword against his comrade and against all the army.

The Lord caused the Midianites to kill each other. God didn't just pitch in and help out. He wasn't just a pinch hitter.

[ 29 : 17 ] God fought and he won the battle for Gideon. finally, fourth takeaway, the only true king.

A friend gave Celeste and I a Bible comic when Kiva, our daughter, was, well, right after our daughter was recently born.

So I opened up this Bible comic recently to look at the story of Gideon. Chapter 6 was there talking about God calling Gideon. Chapter 7 was there talking about God delivering the Midianites into his hand.

Chapter 8, totally missing. Nothing on chapter 8. In a way, I don't blame the author or the editor.

Chapter 8 is the dark, ugly ending to Gideon's life and can show us what happens if we forget to trust God.

and we only trust ourselves. What happens in chapter 8? After winning the battle against the Midianites, Gideon continues his pursuit of two Midianite kings.

[ 30 : 34 ] And along the way, he comes across two Israelite towns of Sukkoth and Penuel. And he asks the men of both towns to feed his own 300 men as they're hungry after the last battle.

But both Penuel and Sukkoth reject his request. And so, after Gideon captures the two Midianite kings, he returns to Penuel and to Sukkoth and he murders all the elders of Sukkoth and he murders all the men of Penuel.

He kills his own Israelite brothers. And later on, Gideon asks the people of Israel to donate part of the spoils towards making an idol which he places in his own hometown of Ophrah, the exact place where God told him to tear down the pagan idols of Baal and Asherah.

And finally, when the people of Israel ask Gideon and his sons to be their kings, Gideon initially says, I will not rule over you, nor will my sons rule over you.

The Lord will rule over you. But what does Gideon do? He does the exact opposite. He acts like a king. He takes many wives.

[ 31 : 50 ] He has a concubine. He has 70 sons. And he names one of his sons Abimelech, which means my father is king. What is going on here?

This story is not ending like it's supposed to. But notice in chapter 8. In chapter 8, Gideon no longer has any communication with God.

He no longer relies on God for God's deliverance and power. His own hunger for power consumes him and becomes his idol.

And what is the result of idolatry? Oppression. Chapter 8, verse 27 says, on the idol that Gideon put up in his hometown, it says, Israel whored after there and it became a snare to Gideon and to his family.

After Gideon died, his son Abimelech murdered all but one of Gideon's 70 sons. Tragic.

[ 33 : 02 ] And Israel continued this cycle, this downward cycle. Israel wanted Gideon to be her king.

But the truth is, Gideon was no king. Gideon needed a king himself. Gideon needed a king to deliver him. Gideon would not have been the perfect king, but there is no king on earth, past or present or future, who is perfect.

the whole Old Testament was crying out for a righteous king. But as we learned two weeks ago, no king is righteous. Not in the Bible, not in our modern day.

There is no king on this earth who is comparable to the king of kings, our Lord Jesus Christ. Gideon came from humble beginnings as a farmer.

He was weak. God called him a mighty warrior. But look at Christ. Christ had all the glory of heaven surrounding him.

[ 34 : 13 ] But in humility, he took the form of a man. He was born in a lowly manger in Bethlehem. He rode into the city of Jerusalem on a donkey, not a white army horse.

After defeating the Midianites, Gideon elevated himself to a king-like position. But Jesus Christ never elevated himself. Paul writes in Philippians, I love this passage, Paul writes that although Christ was God, he did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant.

Being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Christ humbled himself for us. In order for Gideon to win the battle against the Amalekites and Midianites, much blood had to be shed.

Many Midianites and Amalekites had to die in order for Israel to be delivered that day. And for all of us today, because of our desire to be our own kings in our kingdom, to be in control of our destiny, to follow our idols of our children's success, of money, of power, of relationships, we sin against God and we become God's enemy.

[ 35 : 50 ] And because of that, we have to shed our blood. But instead of raising his sword against us, Jesus Christ shed his blood for us.

On the cross, Christ suffered torturous pain. He bled from his hands and feet. His body was beaten and bloodied, bruised. He was whipped. But worst of all, he was separated from his Father in heaven.

But Christ did this for us. When we should have died for our idolatry, Christ died for us.

And that is why the gospel is the good news. Christ, who had no sin, became sin for us for that we might become the righteousness of God.

Friends, today, please believe that if your life is hidden with Christ, if your faith is in him, you have been delivered from the oppressive nature of idolatry.

[ 37 : 00 ] No more guilt nor shame. And we do nothing to receive this. It is God's grace and our weakness his strength.

life. When we face the impossible battles of life, we can get on our knees and we can rejoice because when we are weak, God is strong.

When the odds are stacked against us, that's when God's glory shines. Look at Gideon. Then, look at David and Goliath. Look at Daniel and the lion's den.

look at Abraham, Moses, Joseph, Elijah, and Paul. And then more importantly, look at the incomparable Jesus Christ, our Lord. On the cross, he became weak and frail.

He became sin for us. But Christ rose again in power and is now seated at the right hand of the majesty of the Father in heaven with all authority power and dominion over heaven and over earth.

[ 38 : 13 ] When we are insufficient, Jesus Christ is more than sufficient. Praise be to Jesus, our Lord, our God, our King.

Would you join me in prayer? Father God, thank you for your word, Lord. Thank you for this passage, living and active and powerful.

Pray God as we take this word into our hearts, Lord. I pray, Lord, that it would fall upon fertile soil, Lord, that as we look into our own hearts, look into our lives, and we see our own weaknesses, we see the areas that we struggle, Lord, we wrestle with, that we really want to just take control ourselves.

Father, I pray that you would help us to see, Lord, that in our own weakness, when we can't take care of our own business, Lord, if we give it to you, Father, you are there.

That is where your power is revealed. That is where your glory shines. I pray, God, that we would see this this morning, Lord. We would accept this, Father.

[ 39 : 32 ] that this would be a reality into our lives. Thank you, Jesus. In your name we pray. Amen.